

The King's Entrance

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[0 : 00] Wonderful. Well, since he's not here, let me just extend my thanks to Peter, who worked so hard on that as well behind the scenes. He would never say that publicly by himself, but he worked so hard to put that together along with the rest of the team.

How good was that? Folks, just think this time last year we hadn't even heard the word Zoom. And there we are. Let's hope this time next year there's some kind of swear jar Zoom equivalent that every time we mention it, something goes in the pot.

But let me just take us in for 15, 20 minutes from thinking about that nativity, just reflecting on some of the things that we've seen. And let me tell you about a rainy day which happened on a Saturday afternoon a few weeks ago in our house.

It's the kind of afternoon, I guess, you get them a lot this time of year in Scotland, where you're going to just accept that you're in for the day. You know those kind of days? You're just going to in. One o'clock in the afternoon, the whole kind of afternoon's ahead of you, but no, we're going to just stay in.

So we decide we're staying in. We say to the kids, kids, how about a film? And they say, we'd love a film. We say, well, what film would you like? Knowing that we've got kind of a few days left on Disney+, hoping that we go for that.

[1 : 10] And so they say, well, how about, we'd love to watch Aladdin. And inside I'm containing myself, thinking, all right, okay, we can put that on if you like. But inside, okay, I'm going, yes, Aladdin, right?

My favourite Disney film when I was growing up. Absolutely loved Aladdin. So I'm delighted with their choice. And it comes to the point in the film, which is my favourite scene. It might be your favourite scene as well, if you've seen it.

It's the one where Aladdin, dressed as Prince Ali, he's been transformed into Prince Ali, and he's kind of waltzing up to the palace. Okay? And you've got that scene of there's bright colours, there's fanfare, there's dancing, there's animals, and it's all to that kind of really catchy song, you know, the one.

And I'm watching this, and I'm thinking to myself, oh, man, that is what I'd call a king's entrance.

Okay? If I was a king, if I was going to go for it, that's how I would enter the stage. And kind of there is Aladdin with the princess in his mind, and he's the street boy who's aiming high.

And I guess as I've kind of reflected on that this week, on Aladdin, reflected on the Christmas story, it strikes me and it struck me once again that the entrance of God's king into the world was profoundly the opposite.

[2 : 27] Here's what the Christmas story does. It invites us to come and encounter the living God who has his heart set on the lowly.

Okay, here's this man, this first century doctor-cum-historian called Luke, which is kind of where the nativity's taken from. Luke, who has most likely been employed by this man called Theophilus.

You get this right at the start of this gospel. He's been employed to historically and accurately look into the things about Jesus, to authenticate them. Did these things really happen? Who is this man? So that this man, Theophilus, can have, and the key word in Luke's gospel is that word certainty that you get right at the top. Luke's written this account so that this man and every reader ever since can have certainty about this man called Jesus.

Okay, and into our world of fake news, and into our world of fact-checking, isn't it wonderful to reflect on the fact that we can, we have something here that we can trust, we have something here that we can stake our lives upon, and that has transformed the lives of countless people across the world, down the ages, as people encounter Jesus, as they come to encounter God's reliable and

trustworthy word.

[3 : 47] The living God, whose word this is, and whose heart is set on the lowly. And we're straight into that in the Christmas story.

I mean, you read it, and it's almost as if Luke's gone out of his way to show us that every person and every character in this story should surprise us. Think about what we've just seen.

Okay, think about Elizabeth and Zechariah, right? Not your young and up-and-coming trendy family, 2.4 children, living the suburban dream, you know, the kind you'd expect to see on an advert for a Jet 2 holiday, right?

That isn't these guys. They're a couple with pain in their past and perhaps shame in their present because they are old and they have no child. It's not as if they're bad people, they're good people. And the angel appears and says, what's the first thing? God has heard your prayer. What do you think that prayer was? Right? Just laying his soul before the Lord.

[4 : 50] The pain, the questions of life. And think about Mary. She's not the aspiring young professional living up in the penthouse suite in the big city, is she? Up at 6 a.m. for a Zumba class and straight into work.

She's likely this young teenage girl, probably with not a lot going for her in life except that she's in love with the young village carpenter. Into the bargain, she's from Nazareth.

People in the Bible, you get it. I love it. They make jokes about that place. Who would come from Nazareth? What good could come from there?

And that's why, friends, if you're here today and you're hurting and you're worried and you're scarred and your future you think is looking bleak, what is going to happen, then I want you to know that you're in good company because this is the original Christmas cast.

And I have to say, I love the realism of the Bible. I love the rawness of the Bible. You know, a few Fridays ago, Alex and I were sitting with our newborn trying to bounce her.

[6 : 02] We thought we'd just put something on the telly. Friday night, we thought we'd just flick through the channels. What's on? The One Show. Okay. Ever watched The One Show? Me neither. Okay.

So we're watching The One Show. And who's on The One Show? So this is kind of what got us interested. There's Robbie Williams. He's on The One Show and he's talking about his new Christmas song. Apparently he's got a new Christmas song out. Presenter asks him, Robbie, thinking about your lyrics, is it fair to say that 2020 hasn't been an enjoyable year for you?

And Robbie's put this song together, apparently to kind of, it's kind of given voice to his frustration this year. And do you know what he said? He said, I've decided what I'm going to do with 2020 is I'm just going to wipe it out of my memory.

I'm going to pretend that it doesn't exist. And everyone around the sofas is going, that's a great idea. That's a great idea. But watching it thinking to myself, if only life was that simple.

Okay. It's okay to say if you've got a lot of cash in the bank, a lot of security there, I'm sure. But if only life were that simple, we could just wipe out the bits that we didn't like.

[7 : 08] My friends, some of us will have scars and emotional memories from this year that will stay with us for the rest of our days. Okay. And it seems to me that escapism is not a very good place to go.

And that's why I love the Bible, because it is real and it is raw. And it presents us with life as we know it. Okay. And it presents us not just with life as we know it.

It presents us with a God who didn't just look on from a distance. Sympathetically, you might say, but no, he didn't look on sympathetically from a distance. It presents us with a God in the person of Jesus, God in the flesh, who entered our lowliness, who became weak and vulnerable, who came down into our world of pain and questions.

This is Jesus, God in the flesh. But back in the story, Mary's pregnant, but not because of Joseph, but because the God who in the beginning formed life itself from nothing has caused a life to form in her womb, which is a sure and certain way of showing us that the hope that's dawning on the world that's about to break in is nothing of man's doing.

It is all of God's doing. Jesus, the clue's in the name. His name means God saves. God saves. It's not a boat from the blue either.

[8 : 36] Mary gets this. She connects the dots. She gets that this is God making good on the promise that we read right at the start. We heard read of the nativity, the promise that he'd made to

his people that one day through them, centuries before to Abraham, he was going to act to bless the peoples of the nations and save his people.

And this is what makes Mary burst into song. She understands what's going on here. And as we cast an eye over the lyrics of her song, and if you've got a Bible there, you might want to check in at this point.

Beginning at verse 46, Mary's song of praise, her magnificat, here's the question that we need to ask ourselves. The question surely can't be, do we have her life?

Because we don't have her life. We don't know what she was going through. What we've got is the details we have here. The question is not, do we have her life? The question surely is, do we share her song?

This God has done great things for me. Joy has invaded her soul. Hope has burst into her heart. And let me just say, this is what knowing the God of the Bible does.

[9 : 54] The constant refrain in the Psalms, as you read them through, that at your right hand are pleasures forevermore. That you put more joy in my heart than when their grain and wine abound.

This God is joy giving. And here's what she exclaims. Verse 46, Notice the threefold repetition of my there.

Okay, this is no kind of generic burst of praise. This is a deeply personal for Mary. He's my Savior. He's my God. He's making good on his promises for me.

And really quickly, let me just pick out two things that make Mary's heart sing as we see it in her song here. Here's the first one. She's singing that her king is coming with mercy in his eyes.

Do you see it? Verse 50, his mercy extends to those who fear him from generation to generation. Her king's coming with mercy in his eyes.

[11 : 01] That word mercy there, it's the Lord's compassion, his love, his undeserved favor, his grace. And this God shows it to those who what?

Acknowledge his existence. No, he shows it to those who fear him. Okay, two different things.

God's mercy is for those who would reorientate their lives and live them in light of who he is.

And that mercy, do you see how she reflects on the fact that it extends? Okay, it extends. It keeps on going. Do you not love an extension? Right, not talking about a house.

Okay, eat out to help out. See, when I found out that was going on for another month, extended, delighted. Okay. This invitation that God makes to come and experience his mercy as you come to know Jesus, it keeps on going from generation to generation.

So the question we have to ask is have we entered in to celebrate his mercy? There's a constant refrain in the Bible that thrills the soul of God's people that this God does not treat us as our sins deserve.

[12 : 14] Rather, he is compassionate and he is gracious. He is slow to anger. He is abounding in love. And that truth that thrills the souls of God's people is reaching its pinnacle right here in the coming of Jesus.

He's remembered, sorry, he has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful. Right? So God's not some kind of politician who's made some massive promise years ago and then tried to wriggle out of that promise before somebody picked them up on it and then the politician said, oh, well, I guess I should make good on that.

Mary's saying, God, you said you'd do this and you've done it. You've done it. You've followed through on your promise. You've made good on your word.

Friends, do you know what? I'm discovering more and more as I go on in the Christian life that the God of the Bible is always so much greater than I think he is. Mary's singing.

She's rejoicing that her king's coming with mercy in his eyes and she's singing secondly and quickly because her king is coming with might in his arm. Do you see that? Verse 51. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm.

[13 : 27] He's scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. So she's recalling here that her God always has a track record of getting the victory.

She reflects on it, right? God saved us from captivity in Egypt. He led our ancestors through the Red Sea which is the event that defines the very nation of Israel. And she's reflecting the fact that this God is at it again.

Right? An impossible situation. Nowhere to go. But somehow this God has made a way. Right? And this God has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

Those who think that they've made it. Those who are worshipping themselves. Those who are lifting themselves up. He'll bring down the mighty, this God.

And he'll lift up the humble. Okay, of course, in Mary's world, the supreme power of the day is Rome. Just reflect on this for a minute.

[14 : 32] It's Rome, right? Top of the tree is Caesar. Now, never in a million years would you have conceived in this day that 2,000 years later people's first thought when they hear the word Caesar today is salad.

Okay, a few bits of lettuce, a sprinkling of croutons. That's what we understand. The first thing that we think of when we hear the word Caesar. And yet, here we are today and this baby to be born to this peasant girl, not only are we still talking about him, but apparently 2.7 million new people each year.

No idea how they figure that out and I'm sure that figure will be much higher because it doesn't account for the underground church. 2.7 million new people each year choose to follow him and there are 2.4 billion people alive today across the world who call him Lord.

Why? Because of what the angel said at verse 33 of his kingdom.

Remember, this is a baby yet to be born who will come next week, we'll see, arrive in the manger of his kingdom.

[15 : 52] There will be no end. And I'd say the proof is in the pudding of that one. Here is a magnificent song, a heart response to a quite incredible bit of news.

Mary is singing that her king's coming with mercy in his eyes and she's singing that her king is coming with might in his arm. And both of those things will be so perfectly embodied in the child that Mary will bear, Jesus.

the king who is all mercy and the king who is all might. And the king gloriously who didn't just look on the lowly, the God who would become lowly.

God made low. you know, essentially the story of Aladdin it ends with, doesn't it, the boy born in poverty becoming the boy who gets the riches. That's right, isn't it?

Street rat, that's what he calls himself. Makes it right to the top. Friends, the gospel is all about Jesus, the one who knew all riches, right?

[17 : 09] John 17, the one who knew that he had an experience, glory with his father before the foundation of the world. Giving that up and becoming the boy born in poverty.

And he would go even lower all the way to the cross so that in him we who are poor might become rich as we know the forgiveness and the loving kindness of being right with our creator.

And so here's the question as we leave Mary's song. Here's the question. Not do we have her life but as we come into another advent and maybe even for the first time this morning asking yourself do you share her song?

My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my saviour for he has done great things for me.

Let's pray. And maybe let's just use this moment just to reflect on some of the things that we've thought about. This God he has done wonderful things for me. And so heavenly father we worship you this morning for who you are the God of all grace.

[18 : 35] And thank you for advent and being able to celebrate and having our own language and be able to read the account of the arrival of your king your son Jesus into the world.

and so father I pray for for some of us here today who perhaps don't know you perhaps who maybe the fire in their heart that was once there the joy of knowing you is no longer there.

Father I pray that this Christmas we would recapture something of the heart of Mary's song here that my soul greatly rejoices in the Lord because he has done great things for me.

Father thank you that you hear us and we pray these things in Jesus' precious name. Amen.